



ADRIAAN JAN WESSELINK (1909 - 1995)

A.J. Wesselink made important contributions to the study of a wide variety of variable stars. However, it is for his work on the determination of the radii of pulsating stars (the “Baade-Wesselink” method) that he is perhaps best known to astronomers generally and his name will continue to be mentioned in this connection. ‘Wes’ had considerable independence of mind and wide interests. Thus he wrote a classic paper on the nature of the surface of the moon as derived from lunar eclipse observations and he was intrigued by the possibility that some forms of stellar variability might be explained by relaxation oscillations.

He spent 18 years in mid-career in South Africa, first as astronomer in charge of the Leiden southern station, Johannesburg (1946-50) and then as chief assistant (i.e., assistant director) at the new Radcliffe observatory Pretoria (1950-64). Amongst his many investigations with the Radcliffe 1.9m reflector the most notable was probably his discovery with Thackeray of RR Lyraes in the Magellanic Clouds; work which was of such crucial importance for a revision of the extragalactic distance scale.

His friends remember him for his cheerfulness, his enthusiasm for astronomy and his devotion to his family.

M. W. Feast